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POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

highway of vitally expressive correspondence has been almost overgrown. About it breathes the air surrounding yellow cave-cliffs, classic plinths and Theocritean idyls, the air of something vanished but immemorial. As an admirer closing the book exclaimed, "No one will ever write such letters again!"

E. W.

ARENSBERG AND THE NEW REALITY

Idols, by Walter Conrad Arensberg. Houghton Mifflin Co.

The problem that chiefly agitates the mind of the modern artist—I mean the artist who is possessed by life and who must express its beauty as clearly and sincerely as he can—is, what position he should take toward reality.

The positions that for many years used to be taken as a matter of course by English or American artists, are no longer tenable. The modern painter, for instance, if he is a student, a searcher, will no longer be satisfied with expressing the poetry of nature, not even in the styles of Inness or Corot. Prettiness, which used to be called beauty; preachiness, wistfulness, more or less refined allegory; realism, whether of light, line or substance; spirituality—none of these will answer his soul's needs, not entirely. His aim is to express the rhythm—the color or line rhythm—the song of reality. His manner may be fantastic, whimsical, or even "realistic." His highest ideal perhaps is to be excited enough by the wine drunk by his senses to create something. Create! Something new! As the trees and the moon and the sun were new on the first day.

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Of course his attainments are not always so great as his aspirations.

How far are these new strivings—these new effects—attainable in poetry?

Poetry has some advantages over painting, and it is also under some disadvantages. Its advantages lie in the fact that the poet has always used reality with more freedom—boldness—than the painter; and so has escaped, even in its most conservative form, the prettiness and other defects so distasteful to the modern palate. In his free handling of reality he has to a certain extent reached the ideal of the modern artist.

But poetry being made up of words, of which each one has a distinct sense, it is hard for the poet to escape realism, with its temptation toward prettiness, more or less refined allegory, etc. A combination of colors, even if one could not understand the harmony underlying it, might still seem beautiful. I believe that a color-symphony of Kandinsky's has some charm even for those who can not see in it what that painter expects them to see. While words without sense would of course be nonsense.

Mallarmé has tried to overcome this difficulty by devising a new kind of symbolism, or rather by emphasizing an established poetic form: he tried to express emotions pictorially. But this, if accepted, could hardly bring us any nearer, as it would turn an art in many ways more advanced than painting back to an earlier stage of painting; and Mallarmé himself seems to have recognized this.

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These thoughts occurred to me while reading Mr. Arensberg's *Idols*. This poet, modern as he is, and scorning to conceal the influence of Mallarmé on his mind, seems to have recognized the difficulty of expressing in poetry the effects the modern painter expresses in his art. With perhaps two or three exceptions, he submits to what appears inevitable. In most of his poems there is a boldness in the handling of symbols, or a capricious mysticism, which distinguishes them as twentieth-century work; but on the whole they are not, as regards their newness alone, different from other poems.

The present reviewer, though not ready to admit that poetry could not be brought more into accord with the ideals of the modern painter, has read this book with very great pleasure. I can read again and again the *Song of the Souls Set Free*, sung from above the clouds:

What can they be bowing under,
Wild and wan?
Peep, and draw the clouds asunder,
Peep, and wave a dawn.

Or, in a somewhat similar strain though in a dissimilar mood, and speaking probably of the poet, in a poem entitled *Dirge*:

Make of the moon about the eaves of space,
You who upon the earth are doing nothing,
The circle of a swallow
In the twilight.

When this poet is a little mystical he is convincing—a rare and felicitous faculty; as in *After-Thought* and in *To the Gatherer*. Among so many beautiful poems, I really do not know which to single out. In *Falling Asleep*, perhaps the most modern poem in the book, the author speaks of the

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mind's vague wanderings, before losing consciousness, in this charming manner:

Lay aside your sandals
That have fled
Down a night of candles
By the bed.

Consider the Lilies, with its wistful-worldly advice, *Landscape and Figures*, *At Daybreak*, *Servant*, *June*, *The Swan*—each one of these is as beautiful as the other. *Human* reads too much like a translation of Mallarmé. *Autobiographic* I do not clearly understand; it seems to be based on the mystical side of Cubism—its least important side, strange as this may sound.

Max Michelson

OUR CONTEMPORARIES

I

"Timeliness is not one of POETRY's vices," writes one of our contributors, adding a "thank heaven!" by way of propitiation. Because of an effort to practice this vice we must make amends to Señor de la Selva, the distinguished young Nicaraguan poet and critic, whose article on Rubén Darío, listed for our May number, was delayed till June, and then July, because of the pressure of subjects more immediate; until his topic had been appropriated by Mr. Silvester Baxter in the June *Poetry Review of America*.

In this, the second number of the new Boston paper, the editor graciously thanks POETRY and the later organs of the art for "breaking a path through an unknown field beset with great obstacles." The path of progress, like that of true love,